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RAIN '85

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The Magic of Birds

At the edge of our farm
by the stream
a small forest grows
one of fir and spruce
hemlock and cedar
it is just large enough
to hide the lane
that passes by
and to quiet
the busy world around us
I have been told
by men who know
that it could be thinned
and later harvested
while I sat at its edge
to consider this question
a gray forest hawk entered
as quiet as leaves
on a still day
it hunted from tree to tree
perching at each to observe
then it flew on
leaving me alone
with the trees
and my answer.

Russel Hunter



2
Stephani Stephenson

THE LONG ARCTIC NIGHT

The long arctic night has begun. We are late this year. Always, we try to get to our village before the night comes, with its dreadful cold and the harsh, dry winds that blow ice buttons.

We've been slowed this year because of Aune. Pretty Aune, with her huge black eyes, her skin deep brown and clear like her mother's, this daughter of mine is precious to me. I glance at her, lying on the sled, belly distended with her soon-to-be-born first child. Her husband, no older than she, walks beside her. The ice pack is free of snow for now and the going is not hard.

Kalluk, my eldest son, raises his hand, and we all stop, my woman, my other sons and their families, Aune's husband. The dogs immediately drop to their bellies, and curl, licking their feet. I lean against the hand-high guide of Aune's sled, my breath aching in my lungs, voices drowned by the loud rushing in my ears. A hand touches my arm. I turn my head, to see my woman watching me. She tugs my sleeve and I leave the support of the sled and follow her, my legs old and shaky.

The tents are laid out, ready to be set up. I reach for the whale bone ribs but Kalluk, impatient, takes them from me. "Aune's baby comes. We need the shelter fast," he says. I stand and watch, feeling useless

My wife tugs my sleeve again. "Help me." For a moment anger burns my stomach, that I am reduced to a woman's work. But Aune needs shelter, and my son is right, the tents rise faster without my help.

It is not long before the sleds are unpacked and tilted against the shelter, the dogs curled in the space between tent and sled. The wind is rising, ruffling the caribou skins that form the tent. The skins are old, ones my woman cured and sewed many years ago, when she was younger. There are patches sewn in places, not many, for old skins tend to tear when new ones are added.

A fire has been lit in the brazier, and a blackened pot sits in the midst, steam beginning to rise from the stew. I blink at the fire as smoke thickens inside our shelter, wondering who started the fire. I have no memory of that, and it scares me.

No one says anything as we dip our fingers into the stew. Fighting the cold and the darkness wears a man down, making him crave the fire. And food. The dogs go hungry again tonight; our food is almost gone, the village another three days away if the weather holds for us. I glance around, noticing the drooping lids of my grandsons as they struggle to stay awake long enough to eat. Their sisters, faces round and chapped, eat daintily, blinking with tiredness, too. I am an old man and they are at the start of their lives. They need the food more than me, so I stop after two bites, and tell myself that I am full.

Kalluk watches me and so I look across the smouldering flames at him. His face is solemn, his eyes sad. My chest tightens until I can't breathe and I cough, desperately needing air. For what good is a man, too old to hunt and no teeth with which to chew the meat?

Aune breaks the silence. She groans, and grasps my woman's arm. "The baby," she whispers, and my sons, Aune's husband and I stand, shifting furs so she will have a place to lie. I gather my sons' children to me and we go into the other tent. It does not take long for them to sleep, and I lie beside them, wondering if Aune's child will live. The rhythmic voices of the women lull me and at last I allow my eyes to close.

I awaken with a jerk, lost for a moment, unsure of what has broken my sleep. Kalluk kneels by my side. Seeing I am awake, he motions me to follow him. My body aches: with weariness, with cold, with hunger. There is silence outside. The wind has stopped.

Kalluk waits for me beside the door. He holds the flap aside for me, and I nod my thanks to him. Together we stand, this eldest son of mine and me, and for a moment I remember a time I stood like he stands now. My heart aches for him. I pat his arm. "It is all right. This is the order of life," I say and he nods, then pats my arm in return.

"The child?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

"I will care for him." I am sure the babe was male.

Children's voices come clearly to me through the walls, and I treasure their sounds. I turn back into the tent, Kalluk following. My woman raises her head, fear in her eyes. Tears come when she looks at me, and I smile, offering what help I can to this woman who has borne and buried children with me. And grown old with me.

Too soon breakfast is done, the shelter taken down, the sleds repacked, the dogs hitched

to the traces. I sit by the abandoned tent sites and wait. One by one my sons come, kneel and kiss me. My grandsons and their sisters come, too, eyes huge, voices silenced. I hug them, each one, releasing them to go and stand with their mothers. Last comes my woman. She kneels and takes my hands, tears falling and freezing on her cheeks. She stays with me, until Kalluk comes and lifts her to her feet.

I give Kalluk my parka. I won't need it again.

Aune's husband comes a second time, bringing a tiny blanket and his lost son. I take the babe; we will go together, this lost grandson and I.

A dog howls. The others join him.

Already I shake with cold and my heart leaps with fear. The sleds move away, the slither of whale bone runners sounding loud and final to my ears. I watch until I can no longer see them.

The missionaries tell of a God who doesn't want us to die this way, alone on the ice pack. They tell, too, of a heaven with huge cities, and streets of gold. I think they're wrong. God knows the way of us. He sets the pattern of our lives, sends us the fish and whales, and the caribou. If dying alone on the icepack is wrong, he wouldn't have given it to us. And the missionaries are wrong about heaven, too. Heaven is a land of warmth, where the ice doesn't blow, where babes don't learn to die before they learn to walk, and the young men don't die hunting the whale.

My shaking eases. I begin to feel warm again. And the long arctic night has begun.

Diane S. Hankins



Marc Mauceri

Warm April sunshine--
through a hole in the screen--
the first fly.

Helen C. Acton

Eternity As The Crow Flies

Suspended forever in flight
between two wooded ridges
above a small valley
the crow flies
into an evening sky
filled with storm clouds
coming for the night

Beside the roadway below
I watch.

Russel Hunter

excerpt from a journal

BIRDING THE LOWER COLUMBIA

It was one of those cold between-storm days in Astoria. We took the canoe and proceeded up river to Knappa. At the refuge, Canadian geese were thick, both greater and lesser varieties, intermixed with several pairs of widgeon. A few lifted into the gray sky and continued on their travels.

We put in at Bug Hole and bucked the east wind and wild chop of the interisland channel. Every wave that broke close would drench our hands with frigid water. The wind had dreams of sending us to an untimely death on the bar, constantly driving us oceanward. Reaching the first island, we shot into one of the channels that bisect most of these low land masses.

Hunters reminded us of their presence with staccatto bursts from all around. Nothing could be seen of them, but judging from the amount of gunfire, we were surrounded. Dismayed at the cold, hard pull for nothing more than the privilege of watching harried waterfowl being slaughtered, we decided to go out onto the island proper. It was a very high tide and most of the islands were navigable by the bright film of water that would be over them for less than an hour. At this point our only plan was to be as negative an influence on the hunters as they were on us. Perhaps we could inadvertently scare off a few birds to go further on. But realistically they would only deliver themselves to guns waiting, no matter what direction they flew.

We beached onto some sedge close to a thicket of willow. Then the calming time, when one must slow down and ebb into the pace of life surrounding. Bundling deeper into my heavy coat, I reflected upon our compatibility in such circumstances. For it was a rarity indeed to find someone that would sit in a frozen canoe and meditate. Without the patience and reverence necessary, one would see only the most superficial of happenings.

Our reward was not long in coming; with slight movements deep in the thicket we became aware of tiny birds ... the ruby-crowned kinglet. We watched entranced until they worked the bare branches to a point right under our noses. A bitter wind ripped around us.

A sharp-shinned hawk came screaming over my shoulder. The kinglet, without a breath of hesitation, became invisible. The hawk veered, alighting ten feet away. The thicket was silent, and we sat in slack-jawed amazement. The hawk regained its composure and shot away.

Witnessing the matter-of-fact way that both hunter and prey performed heightened the details. We were privy to the inner working of a world so complex and varied that the elemental forces of life and death seemed precise and beautiful steps in the great dance of existence.

Buoyed by such proceedings, we disembarked onto the now exposed body of the island. The tide was running, leaving soggy pathways abundant. The sun, low in its winter path, was able to burn through the high ice clouds, warming us ever so slightly. Water was gunmetal gray, alive with movement caused by the relentless east wind.

We were in nutria country and signs of their love for roots were everywhere. The holes they dug to get food were treacherous because of a matted covering of vegetation laid down by the high water. Our first discoveries of the danger left us floundering about like wounded duck. Nutes we did see, basking on the bank of the mid-isle channels. Waterfowl continued flying overhead in their desperate search for a spot to land in safety. We wandered back to the kinglet bushes. Three were flitting around, the brilliant red visible on heads of two males. Marsh harriers worked the islands now that the waters had receded. The chill sunlight created a world of pastel. Sedges backed by black cottonwoods with an occasional swamp spruce were topped by ragged stratus clouds.

We scanned the occasional copse with an eye for the big one. The one that perhaps had come early for the smelt season. A season that will bring upwards of ten eagles to these banks at its height. No soap. Blood was sluggish and fingers numb when we turned towards home.

Going back across the river channel, we battled the same forces that had assaulted us on the way in. Hunters were moving in the same direction, whining motors making our progress seem ridiculously slow. A vee of pin tails showed us the way with a living arrow of undulating fowl. Some small shore birds joined us in a rustling cloud, and then were gone. Western grebes bobbed around, allowing us to get quite close.

Loaded up and on the way out we wondered what type of small gray and white bird takes over an entire cow field. Turned out that the question should have been in the plural, for we identified black-bellied plovers, killdeer and snipe. Onward to the warmth of home.

Howard Bruner



Marc Mauceri

SWEET NOTHINGS

I have nothing that you would want, yet nothing
is more not less.

A friendly hug, a gentle kiss, warmth in mere
caress.

One by one sweet nothings pass and fill
our time together.

Given freely till at last, they burst
the lovers' ledger.

There is no price to pay for want of
little nothings.

So take them all with open heart and don't
refuse their gift, for when we're old, bent
and spent their memory will be lent to
lighten darkness fraught with care
and spark loves embers, dying there.

So take these nothings that I give and
suffer not for their return.

If something for nothing, I would ask
a favor small, will be my yearn.

That you should share the gift in end
with someone close perhaps a friend,
and give as freely as I to you,
the nothing less than love.

Lisa Wynne

ADOLESCENCE

It was still hot and clammy in the small kitchen, and the fact that I was elbow deep in hot sudsy water wasn't helping any.

"Summer is going to be a dilly," I had heard my daddy say at the dinner table. "Here it is only mid-July, and the temperature has been in the high eighties for the last four days. Yep, it's a real dilly."

As I fought with the dried gravy on the plates, I wondered why the weather conditions were such a main topic of conversation for adults. It seemed like a simple thing to me. On the hot days I went swimming and on the cool ones I didn't. Grown-ups were always making a big deal out of a lot of things.

"Mary Jane," my mother's voice broke into my thoughts, "for heaven's sake, turn off the water when you're not using it. It's not free, you know."

"Yes, Mama." I answered like a robot.

"And honey, don't forget to wipe the stove this time."

"Yes, Mama."

Yes, Mama; yes Mama, I thought to myself. Every night it was the same thing. "Now Mary Jane, make sure you wash the backs of the pans. Did you rinse the soap out of the glasses? Don't forget to wash the forks between the tines." It wasn't that I did such a terrible job of doing the dishes. I think it had just become a habit with Mamma to worry about it.

The sun had gone down enough to where the last bit of pink streaked with lavender was slowly sifting into the trees and the flat-top hills.

As the last dish was washed and the counter was wiped, the smells of the coming evening were beginning to drift through the open window above the sink. This was my favorite time of day. I hurried to finish the last bit of tidying and eagerly stepped out into this magic time I had grown to enjoy.

I was on my way to a very special place. As far as I was concerned, it was mine alone. I shared it with only the very closest of friends.

My lilac bush was on an empty lot a block away. Once there had been a house on the lot, but only the cold foundation was left and it had been taken over by wild grasses and flowers. All that was left of the yard were several large trees which were occupied by climbing boys during the day and, off to one side, my lone lilac. "Hey, Mary Jane," a voice broke into the silence, "wait up. I've got something to tell you." It was Judy Thomas.

I increased my pace trying to ignore her, but the padding of her coming feet caught up with me.

"My cat had kittens today," she breathlessly stated. "Want to come see them?"

"Uh...not now Judy. I'm on my way to do an errand for my mother," I lied.

"Oh! I'll come with you. Then we can go see them." She seemed pleased with her solution and picked up on my still increasing stride.

I stopped and faced her. "Well, Judy, I can't because when I'm done I've got to go home and clean my room and well, you know, things like that."

"Oh," she said, looking rejected, "oh, well, I just thought you might like to see them."

"Well, I do want to see them," I tried to explain, "maybe tomorrow or the next day."

"Okay, sure, Mary Jane." She smiled and slowly turned and continued back down the sidewalk.

It wasn't that I didn't like Judy. She was okay enough, a little dippy at times though, like the time I dug up a red ant hill and she started to cry because "after all that WAS their home," and she still played with dolls and well...even though she was in the fifth grade with me last year she had been baby of the class. Besides, I couldn't go see her old kittens now because my best friend was meeting me at the lilac bush.

Rachel wasn't there when I arrived, so I settled down on the damp grass and took in the smell of the lilacs. Rachel always used to beat me to the bush, but since her thirteenth birthday in April, she had changed a lot.

I couldn't remember when Rachel and I hadn't been the best of friends. Oh, maybe a few days now and then when we would fight over some dumb thing and then swear NEVER to speak again, but we ALWAYS made up and our friendship went on. The eighteen months difference in age didn't matter. We always enjoyed the same interests and she understood the things I would confide to her. We spent hours under the lilacs trying to figure out our parents, teachers, and so many other things that confused us. We must have decided a hundred times what we would do when we grew up, but by the end of the week we had changed our minds again. Brothers and boys in general were something to be tolerated, "but," she said, if she ever had one "it would be a Steve after Steven Canyon in the funnies." I knew I'd NEVER have a boy, so my first girl would be Gina after the movie star. So we met at the bush week after week and we promised to always be the best of friends and do everything together.

The grass was beginning to make the backs of my legs itch. I shifted to my stomach for relief. It has been a good half-hour that I had been waiting for her. She had been late the last few times also. I wondered what was keeping her now.

As I waited, I continued to think about our relationship. I thought Rachel was the most beautiful girl in the whole school. Her smooth skin and blue eyes always drew attention. Her name alone was like poetry rolling off my tongue.

Rachel Christine Golden. I would sit and insert her name mentally in important roles. Beautiful starlet Rachel Golden; Queen Rachel; Mr. and Mrs. Golden are proud to announce the engagement of Rachel Christine and countless other honors and titles I gave to glorify that beautiful name.

Rachel's arrival brought me out of my thoughts.

"Hi ya kid. Sorry I'm late. . . had to watch the baby for Mom while she did some shopping."

I wondered why she was suddenly calling me kid when it had been 'hi Mary Jane' for years, but before I had time to think about it, she had placed her sweater on the ground and settled on it, making sure no part of her overlapped onto the damp grass.

"Hey," she said, twirling her long black hair around one perfect finger, "wanna know who kissed me today?"

I started.

"Eric." She grinned.

"Eric? So who is Eric?"

"Oh for heavens sake. . . you know . . . Eric Gordon!"

I didn't know, but she continued.

"He's always hanging around the pool. Well, I dropped my swim cap and he got it and said I'd have to let him kiss me before I could get it back, so, of course, I kissed him."

"Of course." I said. Yet I wondered why she hadn't hit him or something. It always worked for me. "Boys can be such a pain. I know. Why, Henry Fillmore just up and kissed me on the lips once!" I lied. "And in front of the library too!" (Actually it had been in the hall at school and he had bumped me on the arm and said "move it chubby. You're blockin' traffic.").

As she undid the top three buttons of her blouse, I couldn't believe my eyes, but it was there. One small pink ribbon tied in a bow with one tiny rose bud in the center and then two new white straps rising to her shoulders. My cotton undershirt suddenly felt very limp and childish hanging on my flat chest.

"Neat," I said, and then again louder in case she didn't think I meant it.

She smiled with pride while redoing her blouse.

"My Aunt Grace sent me two from Denver," she cooed, "and Mom said I could wear one every day."

We sat in a strange silence for a few minutes. Rachel stood, removed her sweater from the grass, giving it an efficient shake. She then placed it on her shoulders.

I was beginning to wonder if this was the same Rachel I had shared this bush with for years. Had we really spent hours seeing who could blow the biggest bubble?

"We'll always be the best of friends, won't we Rachel?" I asked feeling uncertain.

"Yeah. Sure." She answered while brushing mosquitoes away. "Sure kid."

There it was again; the kid stuff, and I felt young and silly and I didn't even know why.

"Wanna see who can count the most falling stars?" I asked.

"Nah. It takes too long." Suddenly she sprang to her knees and moved closer to the security of the bushes. "Want to see something neat?"

"Sure." I said, sitting up and wondering about the mystery in her voice.

Well, I gotta go now."

"Uh." I scrambled to my feet. "Come on and I'll treat you to a cone at the corner drug."

"Thanks Mary Jane, but I've got to go wash my hair and things." She turned. "I'll see ya."

After she left I stayed a bit longer and as I sat under my special bush and listened to the magic sounds of summer that Rachel could no longer hear, I knew Rachel Christine Golden and I WOULDN'T always be the best of friends. At last the eighteen months did make a difference and for awhile Rachel Christine would go on ahead of me to more kisses, bigger and better bras and being thirteen.

My mama would continue to worry about the dishes.

Daddy would go on stewing about the weather.

I wondered what Judy Thomas was doing tomorrow, in her cotton undershirt, and how she felt about lilacs.

Jean Miller

CHAINED

Do you love me as you say,
or depending on the day,
do you like me, hate me, or maybe just don't care?

Is everything just fine,
or depending on the time
am I only loved when I have been real good?

Can you only love me when
your life is free from sin?
Why can't you love me just for who I am?

Why must your love reflect
your very self neglect?
If only you could separate the two

Then I could be set free
to love, and grow and be,
the special girl I want to be to you.

Jean Miller



L. N. Jarvis

THE PROJECTOR

It all goes, frame by frame, day by day
playing the star, then stepping back to be the
critic
leaping through dimensions of perception and
sense.
When each picture has passed it is instantly
ageing;
with additional recollection the film slowly
decays.
The projector is built to run forward,
the images flow and accumulate a meaning.
It has reverse capabilities but there is no need.
Distortion occurs when, in rewind,
Blurs of faces merge with motion.
Action indefinable;
it's all too laughable.
The plot is lost, the audience oblivious
to the end--
Documentary turned comedy.
Repeatedly the same scenes are relived;
soon the entire spool deteriorates.
Tattered edges, shaky figures.
Next is the projector--
sticking fast with jammed plastic;
the interaction is annihilated.
The projectionist holds the power to flick the
switch
but the cast of characters,
the original scenes within the frames. . . .
That is something else.

Andrea Byrd

INCONVENIENCE

I suppose I can stand
a little sharp rain.
It isn't as if
there's any real pain
simply because
the wind rips my hair.
The ear-chewing cold
I think I can bear;
it's only a moment
from door-yard to car.
The distance I'm walking
is not very far
or as hateful to me
as the miles in a circle
worn deep 'round a tree,
where a dog that I know
is tied by a chain--
more troublesome, that,
than a little sharp rain.

Rae Marie Zimmerling

HAIKU

Spring cleaning--
Your head-mark on the wall:
Small comfort now.

H. F. Noyes

A DAY AFTER YOUR BIRTHDAY
POEM, MOTHER
(OR SHALL I CALL YOU JOAN)

Once those corridors were pasty white
and straight,
a practiced maze; no turn back
to stay in one place,

but you waltzed them with conviction
(and despair: lucky children we were,
it was stored in the boxes of old
photographs to learn of later)
for your brood.

I followed effortlessly knowing even then
that poverty only meant doing without.

Now the corridors diverge,
the layers pivot carelessly in boundless
dimensions,
some as old as jade on the throat of
a dark-skinned woman
or as new as the letter you write
when you are alone;
the layers bloom into strange-colored roses--
we don't know their
names; we follow their
scents.

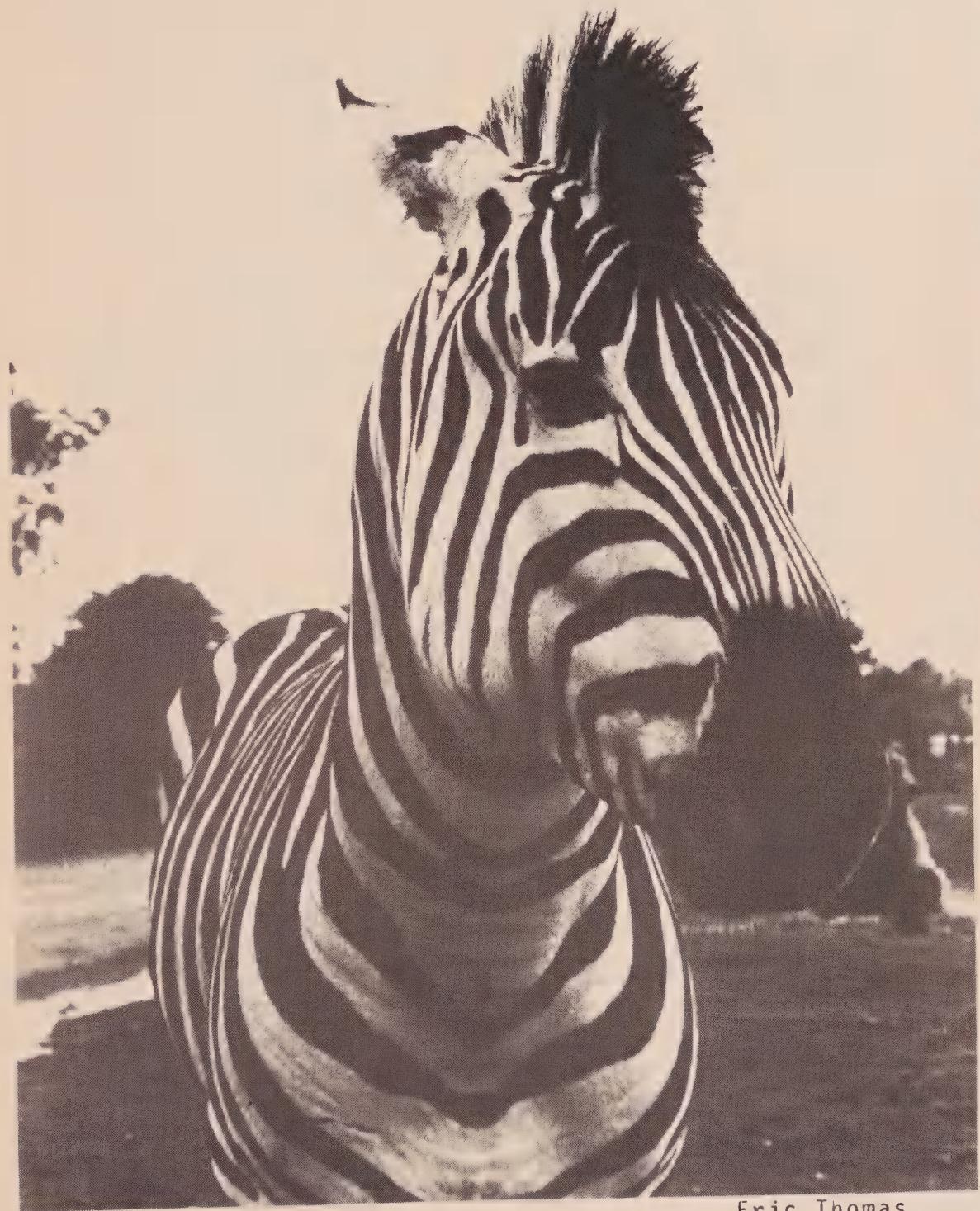
Now we go together and I no longer fold myself
into the sheltering curve of your walk.

Now we go together
when the white walls dissolve
and the maze loses itself at times;

we both are sojourners in a pale green
dawn--

our affinity is immeasurable.

Mallory White



Eric Thomas

Monsoon winds blew down from China one afternoon in late October and swept across the mountains of the Annamite Cordillera, the spinal cord of Vietnam. Huge columns of rain clouds that the winds freighted from the South China Sea massed above sharp jungled peaks and streamed through high, shallow valleys which were terraced with rice fields or were wild and uninhabited. Rays of sunlight shot through the clouds like shifting cannon fire into windblown trees and palms which broke the shafts into spiked prisms and shadows. The wind was cold, and rain from the advancing clouds hammered the jungled ridges with a heavy roar, flooding valleys and peeling away the mottled walls of primitive homes built of mud and thatch which were bunched together in lonely villages. The rain relentlessly poured down upon a haggard and straggled column of armed and helmeted men who were sliding down the muddy ridges toward a village in one of the smaller valleys.

I was among them, second in the ragged file, and I followed the point man into the valley. I was able to see the village beyond a maze of rain-swollen paddies, enclosed by walls of hedge-rows and palms which were whipped by the wind. It was a skimpy place, wretchedly poor as were most villages in the mountains. The farmers and their families lived a harsh existence and were killed early by disease, exhaustion and hunger. In a sense they were frontier people who had left their culture in the overcrowded coastal plains and settled on its rough fringes among stoneage tribes they loathed and feared in much the manner of my own ancestors among the western Indians. The village was an island amidst an ocean of drowned rice fields and seemed suspended in a history of approaching armies. I looked back at the other marines stumbling down from the muddy ridges and saw their reflections in the water of the rectangular paddies, cast against the salt and pepper sky like etchings of war gods.

I noticed that the point man was having a hard time crossing the valley along the spines of paddy dikes that collapsed under the weight of his feet. He was a short, fat man, hunched in his labored walk in the sucking mud, and were it not for his clothes and helmet, I might have mistaken him for one of the small apes that lived on the higher slopes. His back was bent, his hands grasped his knees and pushed his legs to drive them like sluggish pistons one slippery step after another. His rifle swung loosely from a sling draped over his right shoulder and bruised his hip with every move of his legs. His red jowly face was haggard, almost cadaverous, shriveled like an old orange under the green-and-brown dappled bowl that covered his head, which swiveled from side to side almost mechanically. His chin and nose arched as if he was literally sniffing whatever might be ahead or around—an ambush hidden in the trees and bushes, a sniper in a palm tree taking aim. He abruptly dropped his head every few moments to detect mines or booby traps that might have been harvested a month earlier. His head seemed almost as loose as his rifle, and I would not have been surprised if it turned completely around and stared at me.

The thought hardly formed. A shot cracked from the village. Its flat echo was the sound of a popped paper bag at the same instant the point man splashed backward into a paddy. A silence as sudden as the shot lasted only a moment. Most of the other marines dropped to the ground and started firing rifles and machine guns into the village. I discovered myself half submerged in water and mud, choking on slime and vomit. I tried to focus my eyes on something to shoot at but I could only see a small hill I had not noticed before. After a few seconds I realized that it was the point man's rounded stomach sticking out of the water like a dumpling in stew.

A voice bellowed over the gunfire and it raggedly ceased. The voice shouted again and the marines behind me began to withdraw back to the ridge. Three of us ran to the point man and started carrying him. He was dead and he had not taken an ounce of weight with him when he died.

Our initial attempt to run slowed quickly to a lurching walk. I had his legs and pushed at him as if he was a wheelbarrow, desperate to get out of range of a second shot. We finally dropped his body next to a tree and covered him with a poncho. We spread out along the ridge bottom, which was heavily brushed, and pointed our weapons at the village. An officer crouched against an embankment and shouted into a radio for an air strike. He shouted again at another officer who was trying to locate the village on a rain-soaked map, and shouted back into the radio.

We waited for the jets like executioners. The village was almost completely obscured by the rain and by fogs rising from the fields. It appeared and disappeared as if it was straining to vanish before it was found by bombs, to become as much a phantom as the man or woman who had killed the point man.

Two phantom jets came at sunset. The rain had stopped with a suddenness usual in the tropics, and the sky was rouge through holes in the darkening clouds. The jets shrieked down from the tops of the mountains and flew straight for the village just above the mists that blanketed the fields. They barely cleared the trees as they dropped aluminum cannisters of Napalm. Great jellied globes of fire erupted from all over the village, instantly swallowed by billows of black smoke that were as immediately consumed by a terrible heat. The village was on fire. Houses exploded into flame; their thatched roofs burst into the air. Palm trees became torches. Even the mists in the fields were burned away, and we who cowered at the bottom of the slope were slapped by the heat.

The jets rolled back and came again. They dived down the same ridges and across the fields and dropped their last cannisters into the flaming village. I stared at the fires. I felt the stinging heat against my nose and eyes and smelled the acrid smoke blown off the fires by the wind. Helicopter gunships flew in a few minutes after the jets left, and though they were tossed wildly about by the wind, they careened over the paddies like dragonflies, which they resembled. I heard the heavy clatter of their machine guns as they shot up the fields on the other side of the village. Two helicopters shot rockets into the village and then raked it with machine gun fire. A single helicopter broke off and flew towards us and landed. The point man's body was heaved into the open door like a piece of rubbish. The helicopter lifted unsteadily into the air and in a great burst of power it swung onto its side and arched around the mountain and flew across the wind. It rejoined its flock, which flew over the mountains and followed the jets southeast to the coast.

We were left alone again. The sounds of machines and guns were replaced by the final explosions of the fires in the village. We waited until they burned down and crossed the paddies at dusk. The wind blew into our faces and stung our eyes with smoke and ashes. A thin man led us this time. He took us past burnt animal pens, each with its own dead water buffalo. The blackened stalks of palm trees towered above us as we entered the ruined village. We first came upon an old man whose skin was burned green and black. He lay on a raised bed of wood that was charred and smoking. He wore a tattered purple robe that had caught on fire but was not completely burned. His eyes were closed, flies buzzed around his open mouth, and his stiffened arms and hands were raised toward the sky. The wind blew at his scorched white hair. We next passed an elderly

couple whose bodies lay curled like fruit peelings in front of a house that had burned to a bed of glowing coals. The thin man hacked through a wall of broken and smoking bushes with a machete. We emerged from the ruined hedgerow into a stone courtyard that was bordered on three other sides by a low stone wall. At its center was a house, its white walls built of stucco and mud topped by a peaked clay-cobbled roof that had partially collapsed. The walls were stained by moss and in parts overgrown with vines, some of which had been set afire. The courtyard was filled with the bodies of children. Some of them were horribly burned or mangled. Some seemed only asleep, their skins a bright cherry color as if they had been merely sunburned. Some bodies did not seem to be complete and others seemed to be more than one, possibly fused by heat. There were at least a score of them--older children, young children and babies.

I stopped and stared at them. I tried to walk away but I could not move. I did not want to look at them but I was horrified and could not stop staring at them. I almost vomited at the same moment my eyes filled with tears. My mind started to unstuck. Thin callouses that had spread over my sensibilities blistered and ruptured like scabs of wounds. I was engulfed in despair and shame. Ugly sights of broken children in cities and villages superimposed themselves over the bodies, starved and emaciated children whose arms or legs were fly infested stumps, whose small bodies were raw and bleeding from wounds and sores, children who begged and stole for food like desperate young wolves and died alone and unmourned, sometimes murdered by each other. I tried to shut them out of my eyes for months. I had deafened my ears to their screams and pleas, but they persistently haunted my thoughts and filled my dreams. I knew instantly with a chilling horror that the dead

children in the courtyard had been left there intentionally, that they had been carried from all parts of the village by survivors who fled into the fields away from us, perhaps most of them killed by the helicopters that hunted in the wake of the jets on the far side of the valley.

My friend Willie Mac stopped and stood with me over the bodies. His eyes were empty. His gaunt face was expressionless. Marines passed us and moved deeper into the village. Their rifles argued nervously, like snakes searching for prey. Some of the men looked at the children. Most of them tried not to. They did not want to add these deaths to their imperiled lives. They wanted to sympathize only with themselves.

"They left them for us," I said almost in a whisper.

I felt Willie Mac's sudden hard gripping of my arm, pulling me away.

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"Come on," he said. "It's no good."

I stumbled along with him through the broken village. We came across more bodies, steaming with flies, and in some instances parts of bodies, and the bodies of several dead pigs, dogs

and water buffalo that had been cremated in pens behind burnt houses. We found some marines sitting on the hard dirt floor of a partially roofed house which was fringed by a grove of blackened palm trees.

"Find some place to crap out," one of the Marines said. "We're staying the night."

We shared the village with the dead who remained where they died. Heavy rain fell most of the night. I leaned against the door frame of a house that was not completely destroyed and stared out into the dark toward the moldy courtyard and the dead children. My vision was obscured by smashed burnt dwellings and hedgerows and by the ghostly density of rain and fogs that rose from the mud and were whipped by the wind into tattered streamers that seemed to be souls leaving the dead, wreathing about the scattered ashes of their homes a final moment before vanishing into the stormy sky. I imagined the bodies of the children withered and curled like leaves fallen from trees, pounded by the monsoon rains into a compost, their blood leached by the rain, their horrible burns cooled and softened. I turned and shouted into the darkness of the house.

"Why didn't they get the hell out of here! They knew we were coming. They knew we would blow them up."

"Shut up!" Willie Mac hissed. "You almost got yourself convinced it's their own fault their dead."

"Bullshit...."

"You probably wouldn't even give a shit if you hadn't seen the kids."

"I've seen kids blown away."

"Sure, but not like that," he said quietly. "You're scared. You think those kids are your death warrant. You think they're going to get us for this."

"What about the sniper?"

"What about him? All he did was pop one of our boys. We turned their kids into torches."

Of course he was right. I was terrified by the hatred behind the display of the dead children and at the vengeance their deaths demanded. I felt that I would be hunted down for their murderers, and if I escaped Vietnam, that eventually my own mind would be the hunter.

I smoked a cigarette and rolled into a poncho but was unable to sleep. I lay awake for a long time and finally became aware that it was my mother's birthday. I had forgotten. Perhaps the dead children made me remember. I wondered if any of their mothers remained alive, and I felt again my fear of their grief and hatred.

"Happy birthday mother," I whispered. "Your kids are dead."

"You say something?" Willie Mac's sleepy voice croaked.

"I was thinking about my mother."

"You're a cesspool of neuroses."

"I just remembered it's her birthday."

"Happy birthday mother," Willie Mac said.

The next morning we left the dead village
and climbed the mountains on the far side of the
valley.

Michael Paul McCusker



Lisa Wynne

TOKEN AFFECTION

You make me a Midas-lover.
Hording one touch,
greedily desiring
what I never get enough of.
I keep you in my mind
like gold in a vault,
shining obsession
love.

My time is spent in search of you
in the streets
in restaurants
in bars and cars.
I'm drawn along possessed in thought
by what could be
when next we two,
will be as one
and share the wealth
of love.

Lisa Wynne

Untitled

Against a grey sky
I watched the first geese
flying south
noisy, many talking
about their new flight
I considered
the delicate balance
of their formation
a precarious place
so far up there
and so many miles to go
as I worried about a
single misstep of theirs
and its consequences
they flew into the night
unaware of my concerns
cackling back and forth
across the autumn sky

Russel Hunter

MATTERBOX CREATION

A child-being was bored. He was supposed to be studying but decided to go out and play in his "matterbox" instead. He found bits of stray matter drifting about, and in the fashion that any child would construct objects that suited his fancy from materials lying about (like sand), he began putting the matter together. In his small hands, he patted and poked and molded his blob of matter into a spherical shape.

"Hmmm. This looks interesting," he thought, "a little lumpy though." So he patted and smoothed the surface the best he could with his little hands. It wasn't the best job but it satisfied him.

"Perfect," he thought, gazing at the round blob like a great artist admiring his masterpiece.

"No. Not quite perfect," he reconsidered. "It's too round. I'll just flatten the ends a little. Hey, that's better!"

His intense concentration was interrupted by the gentle voice of his mother calling him.

"Where are you, my son? It's time for your meal."

"Coming, Mother," he answered. Excited about showing her his creation, he ran up to her and exclaimed, "Look, Mother! Look at what I've made!"

"Oh, not another one! What? No rings this time? Now I really wish you would involve yourself in your studies as much as you do in your play. It's about time you started getting serious about the books and stop spending all of your time in your matterbox."

"Yes, Mother," he replied and then sighed.

"Now go throw that thing away in the garbage void. I don't want it cluttering up your room."

He went to the garbage bin and opened it. With slight hesitancy, he dropped the sphere into the bin. It floated down and joined all the other objects (some of which were his earlier creations) in their suspension in the dark endlessness of the garbage void.

"Oh well," the child thought, "It wasn't one of my better ones, anyway. Next time, I'll try making a really big one. Maybe with a big red spot or something."

Nina Morgan

THE LAST HUNT

There is no sun yet, only a cool blue moon and a chill wind from the north. The creek lends a soft roar to the myriad of sounds that are always present in the high wilderness. A gust of wind brings the smell of coffee mixed with smoke to his nose and makes him feel a need for a cup to warm his hands and to help him open his eyes. Looking at his watch he sees it is 4:31 a.m. He shoulders his small day pack containing such luxuries as dried fruit, matches, and salt pork, and makes sure that it is properly balanced. It doesn't weigh much, perhaps seven or ten pounds, and the thick parka he wears helps to pad it, but it's not light for a man of 69. After adjusting to the added weight, he puts some wood on the fire for his sleeping wife, grabs his bow, and sets out for the meadow which, over the years, has become sanctuary for him.

As he walks up the familiar trail, he feels the cold ground crunch under his feet, and hears the sleepy call of a red tailed hawk that doesn't like him passing too close to her roost. The sun, by now, is starting to warm the treetops, and the breeze is smelling like pine, and mullen, and dewy leaves. The old man stops to remove his parka before it gets too warm, but already small cool beads of sweat are forming on his brow and the back of his green camouflage shirt is starting to moisten. Just then he sees a figure walking up the trail behind him, and as this silhouette of a man grows close he can see that it is Jason; a fellow hunter, clad in a green jump-suit. The old man has come to know Jason through meeting him often on the trail, and had often had him to his camp to drink coffee and swap stories. He seemed a hunter of great stealth, especially for carrying such a large bowcase. Often the old man had wondered why Jason carried his bow in a case.

Normally, upon meeting in the woods, a simple wave would be all that would pass between the men (as talking frightens the deer for miles around), but on this meeting Jason breaks the tradition.

"I heard this is your last year up," Jason inquires.

"Ya," came the old man's whispered response, "I'm getting too old for this. Besides, the wife isn't getting any younger either; she'd never make it up or back by herself."

"Well that's too bad. Just make sure you get a nice trophy this year."

"We'll give 'er a try. Come for coffee tonight?"

"You bet. Well it's gettin' late. Good luck now."

"You too." And with that the old man continues up the trail while Jason cuts off to the east, towards his own hunting spot.

A few hours later, the old man comes to a large clearing in the trees. The smell of hot wildflowers make it difficult to breathe, and the dust blown up by the breeze sticks to his sweaty, bare chest. His glasses are hot and slippery on his nose as he scans the meadow, searching for any sign of game. At first glance he sees nothing, but being a seasoned hunter he knows that this means nothing, and he continues searching. His persistence is rewarded; forty yards away stands a large, muscular six-point buck grazing on the bright purple salal berries that cover much of the meadow. The old man feels his heart

start to race, and he draws his bow slowly back, taking careful aim. The muscles in his back start to tighten and threaten to knot up, but before they have a chance, the old man releases the arrow. He follows its bright green and red fletching as it races towards the watching deer. An instant later, the old man sees a red blotch appear on the soft, shiny coat of the deer. The deer runs briefly, but soon drops and dies, its red blood in sharp contrast with the green grass.

The old man stands motionless for several minutes, transfixed by the memory of those shiny, black eyes, but after a short time, he starts about the business of dressing out his prize.

An hour later the deer is cleaned and strapped to the old man's back. He starts walking heavily back down the dusty path. The deer smells of raw meat, which makes it even harder to breathe, but the old man is now only a few miles from camp, and the thought of cooking sausage and eggs makes him quicken his step.

One hundred fifty yards from the old man, Jason, looking down from a hill toward the main trail, sees through his telescopic sight a large, dark brown buck. It has the kind of horns that very hunter dreams of, still covered with the soft brown velvety hair that would soon be worn off as the bucks start to sharpen their racks on the rough bark of the pine trees. As the buck comes within range, Jason prepares himself for the one shot that he will have to bring down the buck. Because hunting with a gun during bow season is a felony, Jason attaches a silencer to the end of the already heavy barrel. There is almost no sound as the rifle fires.

Farther down the steep, rocky trail, the old man, almost completely enveloped by the moist deer carcass, feels a sharp pain in his left side which sends him tumbling down the trail.

Dying now on his now bloated belly, the buck still strapped to his back, he realizes that he has been shot and briefly wonders by whom and why. Tears come to his eyes as he thinks of his wife, soon to be alone in this world, and hopes that someone will help her out of the wilderness.

The last thing that he hears is the running footsteps of the poacher coming for his prize.

Kevin Crow



Andrea Byrd

Bartholomew's Nest

Beneath the eaves
a swallow's nest
is filled with long
rooster tail feathers
that hang over
and fall out
she puts them back
they fall out
she puts them back
they fall out
she...

Russel Hunter

WHAT! IS THAT ALL YOU WANTED

You came to me in the dark
and touched my anxious soul.
Over and over you stroked the thing,
and made it pur-r-r-r.
Words rolled from your tongue,
as warm droplets, onto my eyelids, covering them.

You left me in the light.
With quick excuses and slanted glances, you dressed
Double-checking, to be sure you left no reason
for return.
In the silence left behind, I stared at the ceiling.
Honeyed memory grew rank in my eyes
and sealed them shut, until noon.

Lisa Wynne



Marc Mauceri

NOCTURNE

In silent ecstasy the moon showers
her silver rays to earth,
Transparent in joy of giving birth
to inspiration.

Near the crystal brilliance
a lone star watches
a fretful city
forgetting its sorrow,
Resting in anticipation of tomorrow.

Jeanne Louise Frese

A HAND ON THE KNOB

Heavy, tired feet on the stairs.
A limp hand on the doorknob.
Shoes kicked to the corner.
A switch is flicked.
The sound waves infiltrate.
Tights on, hair pushed back.
A toe lifts,
an arm flexes.
Muscles revive, eyes flash
electrically.
A figure whirls.
The cheeks color,
the face moistens.
The waves fade,
The figure ceases.

Light, springy feet on the stairs.
A vigorous hand on the doorknob.

Andrea Byrd

FIELD WELL

An old well stands on my grandparents' farm;
it is long-abandoned, boarded over,
the pump rusted red as a boxcar, the surface grainy
as sand.

The last thirsty farmhand who passed so many years
ago

raised the handle, and finding he could do no more,
left it, a statue pump in a wide field. Now I have
returned to visit the place;

a walk through the pasture has brought me here.
Nearby, a nest of bumblebees mumbles sleepily.

The July sun warms me to the bone.

The pump stands, tranquil and still.

I wish I had never wondered what goes on below,
down in the long length of the clotted shaft.

I would like to think it is cool and empty there,
but I know otherwise, for earth teems with the
eyeless and the blind.

I know, and do not want to know:
beneath my feet, a universe breeds and squirms,
soft, white, and indescribably its own.

The bumblebees fall silent; the sun feels less warm.
A chill like a cave's rises through my thin-soled
thongs.

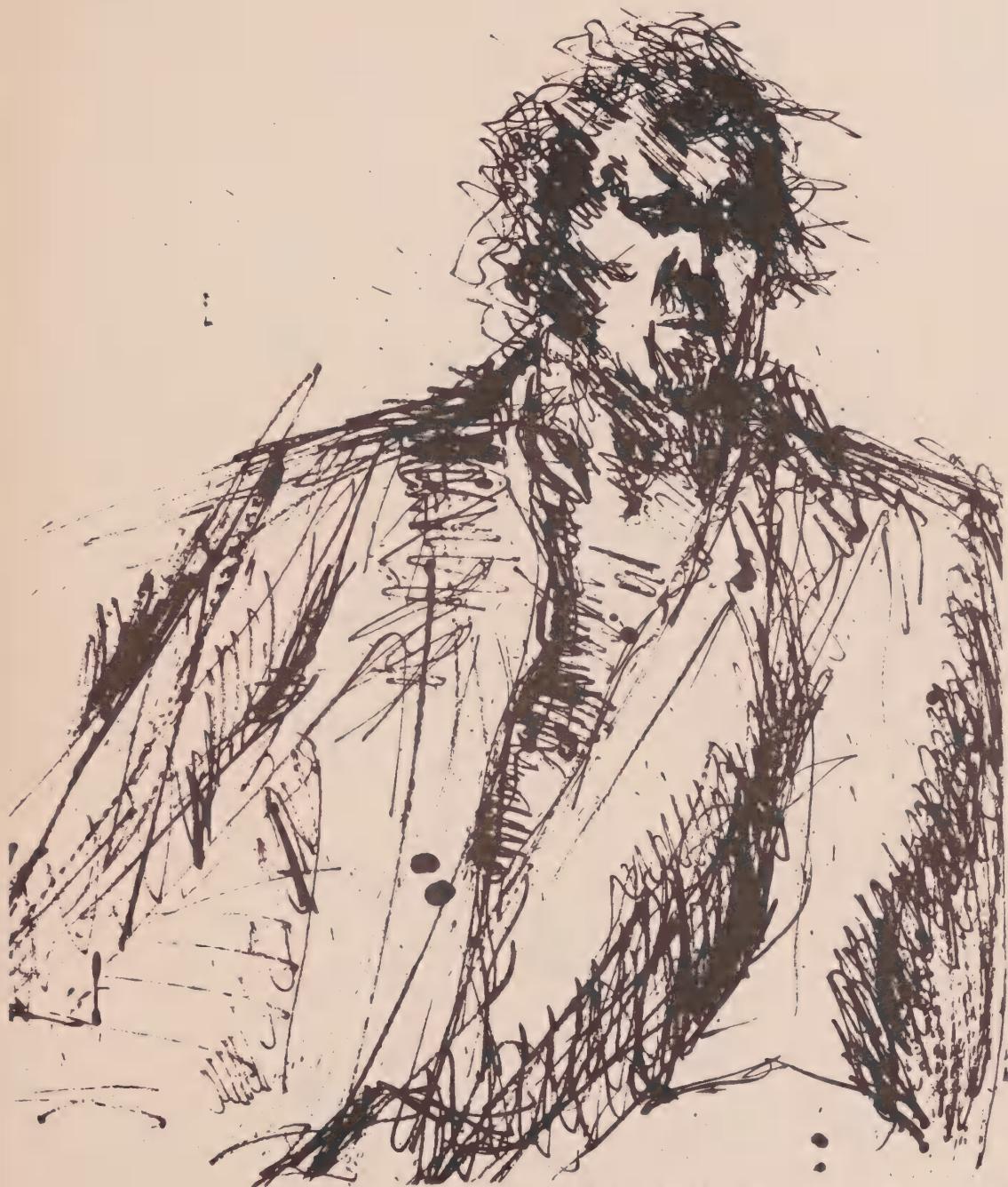
I wiggle my toes as if they were buried in a low
stream's reedy ooze,
and turn and hastily walk away.

Ellen Shannon

NEON CROSS

Brightly it blares
Wailing into the night,
Sending a message forth
Falsely.
Relaying hope--doomed hope.
The cross stands tall,
Screaming for the sinners
To be unshackled.
Like a denial of itself,
The cross flashes
Sporadically.

Julieanne Mosier



Stephani Stephenson

THE BALL

Bouncing, bouncing
the ball ascends, descends.
Skyward it moves, bringing
spirits of things joyous,
among them love.
The ball spins ecstatically,
and those below wonder when
it will drop
and then it crashes down
bringing the sunshine
with it.
The contact explodes and
three are born.
And there, where the ball
hit on the hard ground,
stand Doubt, Resentment,
and Withdrawal.
Together, yet alone.

Andrea Byrd

AFTER HE HAD GONE

I saw
one long sweep of cloud
across the silent blue.
And all that space,
so high, so wide,
was not enough
to fill the void
where he had been
And so I hurried to the sea
and laved my soul
with noise,
then gathered up
the sky, the land,
the wind, the cloud
the sea, the sand,
and filled the gaping hole.

Rae Marie Zimmerling

A RHYTHM OF MY OWN

I want to live
where one nameless day follows another:
nothing special
just day after day.

No dates, weeks, no hourly appointments.

Just the seasons:
the birds, growing things
the storms and dying things
and darkness and light,

A rhythm to make my own.

Jan Spencer

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